TERROR

AN ENTERTAINING COMIC

TALES FROM THE CRYPT

NO. 24

REPRINT EDITION

FEATURING...

THE CRYPT-KEEPER

THE OLD WITCH

THE VAULT-KEEPER

DANGER
QUICKSAND
KEEP AWAY!

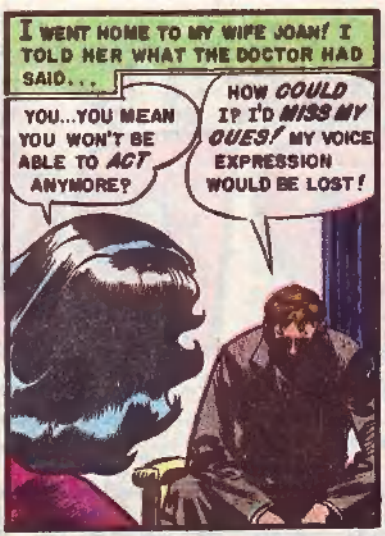
FELDSTEIN

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

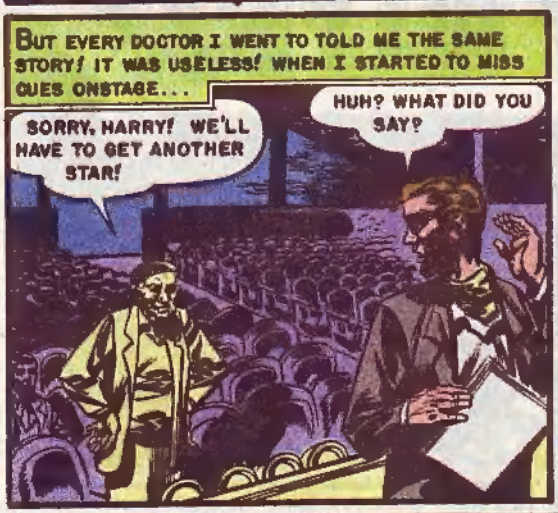
HEH, HEH! I SEE YOU GOT UP ENOUGH NERVE TO BUY *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* AGAIN! WELL, I WON'T DISAPPOINT YOU! YOU'LL GET YOUR FAIR SHARE OF SHAKES AND SHIVERS, BELIEVE ME! READY TO BEGIN? GOOD! NOW LIE BACK ON THE MARBLE SLAB, PULL THE SHEET UP OVER YOUR HEAD, AND I'LL TELL YOU THE FIRST STORY! IT'S *HARRY GORDON'S* STORY... TOLD IN *HIS OWN WORDS!* HE CALLS IT...

BATS IN MY BELFRY!

NO! NOTHING CAN BE DONE FOR YOU! THERE IS NO OPERATION.
I SEE! WELL ...THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING DOCTOR!


I WENT HOME TO MY WIFE JOAN! I TOLD HER WHAT THE DOCTOR HAD SAID...
YOU...YOU MEAN YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO ACT ANYMORE?
HOW COULD I? I'D MISS MY CUES! MY VOICE EXPRESSION WOULD BE LOST!

THERE MUST BE SOMETHING THEY CAN DO! GO SEE SPECIALISTS! MAKE SURE!
I WILL, DEAR! I WILL...


BUT EVERY DOCTOR I WENT TO TOLD ME THE SAME STORY! IT WAS USELESS! WHEN I STARTED TO MISS CUES ONSTAGE...
SORRY, HARRY! WE'LL HAVE TO GET ANOTHER STAR!
HUH? WHAT DID YOU SAY?

AND THEN IT CAME! THE THICK, HEAVY SILENCE! I WAS STONE DEAF! I WALKED IN A WORLD OF STILLNESS! THE TRAFFIC, THE CROWDS, THE ORCHESTRAS IN NIGHT CLUBS...ALL SILENT! I HAD TO LEARN TO LIP-READ TO UNDERSTAND WHAT JOAN SAID TO ME...
I SAID OUR MONEY'S PRACTICALLY GONE! UNDERSTAND? WE'RE ALMOST BROKE...BROKE... CLEANED OUT!
YES, JOAN...

THINGS GOT WORSE! I TRIED TO FIND WORK, BUT I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING! ACTING WAS ALL I KNEW! THEN I THOUGHT OF AN OLD FRIEND, JOHN BAYNE! JOHN AND I HAD PLAYED SUMMER STOCK TOGETHER! THEN JOHN HAD GONE BLIND! I WENT TO SEE HIM...
WELL, WELL, HARRY GORDON! IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU!
DID...DID YOU SAY MY NAME, JOHN? I...I'M DEAF! I CAN'T HEAR YOU! DID YOU SAY MY NAME?

OF COURSE! I RECOGNIZED YOU IMMEDIATELY!
YOU CAN SEE? THEN WHY DO YOU WEAR DARK GLASSES?

TO HIDE MY EYES! THESE EYES!
GOOD LORD!

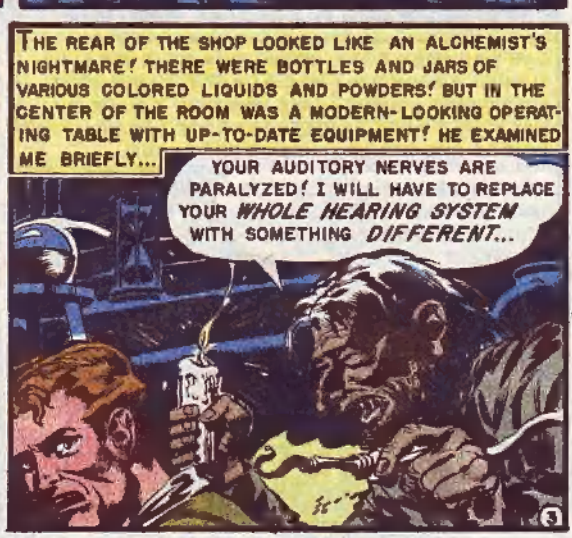
JOHN'S EYES GLEAMED YELLOW IN THE DIM LIGHT OF HIS ROOM! THEY WERE THE EYES OF A CAT...
WHAT...WHAT DID YOU DO TO YOURSELF? YOUR EYES...
YES! THEY'RE CAT'S EYES! BUT WHO CARES, HARRY? I CAN SEE!

I HAD DIFFICULTY READING JOHN'S LIPS, BUT I MANAGED TO UNDERSTAND ENOUGH OF WHAT HE SAID TO GET THE WHOLE STORY...
I FOUND OUT ABOUT HIM THROUGH ANOTHER EX-BLIND MAN! HE'S A GENIUS! HE OPERATED ON ME! GRAFTED THESE CAT'S EYES! AND NOW... I CAN SEE...

DO YOU THINK HE CAN HELP ME, JOHN...RESTORE MY HEARING THE SAME WAY?
WHY DON'T YOU GO SEE HIM? I'LL GIVE YOU HIS ADDRESS...

THE SHOP WAS IN A DARK AND WINDING BACK STREET IN THE SHABBIEST PART OF THE CITY! THERE WERE STUFFED ANIMALS IN THE DUSTY WINDOW...
JOHN SAID HE WASN'T A DOCTOR... BUT... THIS! THIS LOOKS LIKE A TAXIDERMIST'S SHOP!

I WENT IN! A LITTLE BELL TINKLED BEHIND A CURTAINED DOOR AT THE REAR OF THE SHOP! THE ODOR OF STALENESS AND DECAY HUNG HEAVILY ON THE AIR! HE CAME FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN! HE WAS TALL AND DARK... SINISTER LOOKING...
YOU...
YOU WERE RECOMMENDED... BY A FRIEND! YOU... HELPED HIM TO SEE AGAIN! I WONDERED IF...
I SEE BY THE WAY YOU WATCH MY LIPS THAT YOU ARE DEAF! COME INTO THE BACK! I WILL EXAMINE YOU!


THE REAR OF THE SHOP LOOKED LIKE AN ALCHEMIST'S NIGHTMARE! THERE WERE BOTTLES AND JARS OF VARIOUS COLORED LIQUIDS AND POWDERS! BUT IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM WAS A MODERN-LOOKING OPERATING TABLE WITH UP-TO-DATE EQUIPMENT! HE EXAMINED ME BRIEFLY...
YOUR AUDITORY NERVES ARE PARALYZED! I WILL HAVE TO REPLACE YOUR WHOLE HEARING SYSTEM WITH SOMETHING DIFFERENT...

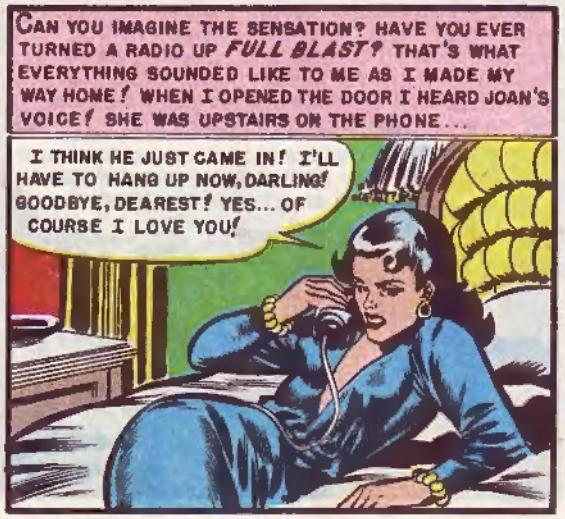
WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN MIND?
I PROPOSE TRANSFERRING THE *AUDITORY SYSTEM* OF A *BAT* INTO *YOUR BODY*...

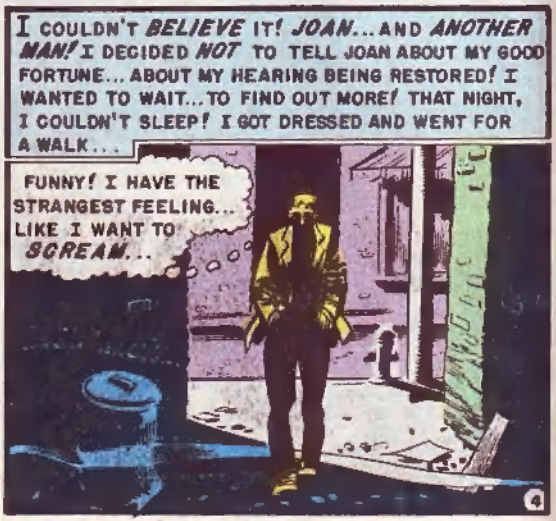
A *BAT!*
YES! THE *BAT'S* AUDITORY SYSTEM IS *UNIQUE!* IT IS *EXTRA-SENSORY!* IF THE OPERATION IS A SUCCESS, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO *HEAR BETTER* THAN YOU DID *BEFORE* YOU LOST YOUR HEARING...

I AGREED TO THE OPERATION! AFTER ALL... WHAT DID I HAVE TO LOSE?
BREATHE DEEP, MR. GORDON!

WHEN I CAME OUT OF THE ANESTHETIC, I LOOKED ABOUT! HE WAS STANDING OVER ME! HE STARTED TO SPEAK...
HOW DO YOU FEEL?
MY HEAD! DON'T TALK!

HIS VOICE SLAMMED INTO MY BRAIN! IT WAS HARSH AND LOUD...
YOU'LL GET USED TO IT, MR. GORDON!
I...I CERTAINLY *HOPE* SO!


CAN YOU IMAGINE THE SENSATION? HAVE YOU EVER TURNED A RADIO UP *FULL BLAST?* THAT'S WHAT EVERYTHING SOUNDED LIKE TO ME AS I MADE MY WAY HOME! WHEN I OPENED THE DOOR I HEARD JOAN'S VOICE! SHE WAS UPSTAIRS ON THE PHONE...
I THINK HE JUST CAME IN! I'LL HAVE TO HANG UP NOW, DARLING! GOODBYE, DEAREST! YES... OF COURSE I LOVE YOU!


I COULDN'T *BELIEVE* IT! *JOAN*... AND *ANOTHER MAN!* I DECIDED *NOT* TO TELL JOAN ABOUT MY GOOD FORTUNE... ABOUT MY HEARING BEING RESTORED! I WANTED TO WAIT... TO FIND OUT MORE! THAT NIGHT, I COULDN'T SLEEP! I GOT DRESSED AND WENT FOR A WALK...
FUNNY! I HAVE THE STRANGEST FEELING... LIKE I WANT TO *SCREAM*...

I GUESS I WALKED ALL NIGHT! WHEN I RETURNED, JOAN WAS GONE! SHE HAD GOTTEN A JOB SINCE I LOST MY HEARING AND MUST HAVE LEFT EARLY THAT MORNING...

I...FEEL...SO SLEEPY... NOW!

A HEAVY DROWSINESS CAME OVER ME! I DON'T REMEMBER FALLING ASLEEP... BUT WHEN I AWOKE...

WHAT IN BLAZES...

I SLIPPED TO THE FLOOR! I WAS IN A CLOSET! I HAD FALLEN ASLEEP HANGING UPSIDE DOWN FROM THE CLOTHES POLE...

WHAT...WHAT'S *HAPPENING* TO ME?

I STAGGERED INTO THE BATHROOM AND LOOKED AT MYSELF IN THE MIRROR! I NEEDED A SHAVE BADLY, BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE...

HAIR! HAIR GROWING ON MY *FOREHEAD*...MY *NOSE! FINE GREY HAIRS*...

I WAS FRIGHTENED! I SHAVED CAREFULLY, CLEARING MY FACE OF THE GROWTH! THEN I STEPPED INTO THE SHOWER! AS I RAISED MY ARM TO SOAP UNDER IT...

WHAT THE...? A *MEMBRANE!* A MEMBRANE GROWING ACROSS MY ARMPIT...

I DRESSED QUICKLY AND RUSHED TO MY FRIEND JOHN'S HOUSE...JOHN, WHO HAD FIRST RECOMMENDED THE STRANGE SHOP WITH ITS STILL STRANGER PROPRIETOR! IT WAS GETTING DARK OUTSIDE! I BURST IN HIS DOOR WITHOUT KNOCKING...

JOHN!

GET OUT... QUICKLY!

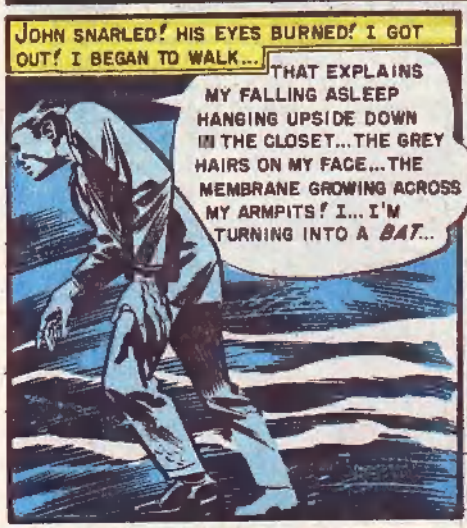
HIS ROOM WAS DIMLY LIT! HIS FELINE EYES GLOWED WITH AN EERIE YELLOW LIGHT! HE LAY IN A CORNER...WHITE, PICKED-CLEAN BONES ABOUT HIM! HIS FACE WAS COVERED WITH A SILK-BLACK FUR...

GET AWAY FROM ME, BEFORE ITS *TOO LATE!* I... I'M AN *ANIMAL!*

WHAT'S HAPPENED? TELL ME! *TELL ME!*

IT'S THAT HORRIBLE FIEND! HE...HE'S DONE SOMETHING TO ME! THESE AREN'T CAT'S EYES HE'S GIVEN ME! THEY'RE THE EYES OF A PANTHER! AND...I...CAN'T HELP MYSELF! I...I HAVE AN INCESSANT URGE TO...KILL!
LORD HELP US!

JOHN SNAPPED ON A LIGHT...
LOOK AT ME! LOOK! I'M EVEN BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE A PANTHER! DON'T GO TO HIM, HARRY! DON'T...
IT'S TOO LATE, JOHN! IT'S TOO LATE!


JOHN SNARLED! HIS EYES BURNED! I GOT OUT! I BEGAN TO WALK...
THAT EXPLAINS MY FALLING ASLEEP HANGING UPSIDE DOWN IN THE CLOSET...THE GREY HAIRS ON MY FACE...THE MEMBRANE GROWING ACROSS MY ARMPITS! I...I'M TURNING INTO A BAT...

AND THAT NIGHT, AS I WALKED THROUGH THE BLACKNESS, I BEGAN TO UTTER SHORT SHRILL SHRIEKS! AND I LISTENED FOR THE SHRIEKS TO ECHO BACK! I WAS USING THE BAT'S RADAR-LIKE DEVICE FOR TRAVELING THROUGH THE DARKNESS! WHEN DAWN CAME, I MADE MY WAY HOME...
WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ALL NIGHT? CAN YOU UNDERSTAND ME? WHY DID YOU STAY OUT ALL NIGHT?
I...I GOT A JOB, JOAN! NIGHT WORK!

GOOD! THEN I'LL QUIT MINE...TODAY!
IF YOU LIKE, JOAN! I...I'M TIRED! I'M GOING TO BED!

SHE WENT OUT AND I LAY EXHAUSTED ON THE BED! AGAIN, I DON'T REMEMBER FALLING ASLEEP, BUT WHEN I AWOKE, I WAS HANGING UPSIDE DOWN IN THE CLOSET! I HEARD VOICES...JOAN'S VOICE... AND A MAN'S...
HE CARRIED A LARGE INSURANCE POLICY... $15,000! HE TOOK IT OUT WHILE HE WAS ACTING AND MAKING GOOD MONEY!
IS IT STILL IN EFFECT?

I LISTENED! FROM MY LAIR IN THE CLOSET, I LISTENED...

YES! THE PREMIUM IS DUE NEXT MONTH!

WE'LL BE *RICH!* AFTER WE *KILL HIM*...

I COULDN'T BELIEVE MY EARS! THEY WERE PLANNING TO *MURDER* ME! I GOT DOWN FROM THE CLOTHES POLE AND SLOWLY OPENED THE DOOR...

GOT TO GET AWAY! GOT TO GET AWAY FROM THEM!

I RUSHED DOWN THE STAIRS AND OUT THE DOOR BEFORE THEY COULD STOP ME...

IT WAS *HARRY!* HE MUST HAVE *HEARD* US! HE'LL GO TO THE *POLICE!*

I'LL *STOP HIM*... IF I HAVE TO...

JOAN'S LOVER CAME AFTER ME! THE SIDEWALKS WERE DARK AND DESERTED! I...RAN...UTTERING LITTLE SHRILL HIGH-PITCHED SHRIEKS! THEY WARNED ME OF FENCES, DEAD-END ALLEYS, AND BLIND STREETS...

HARRY! IT'S NO USE! I'LL GET YOU...

AS I RAN, I LOOKED DOWN! CLAWS SPRANG FROM MY FINGERS WHERE NAILS HAD GROWN...

AND WHEN I DO... HARRY...

I PASSED MY CLAWED HAND OVER MY FACE! IT WAS HAIRY... AND OVER MY LOWER LIP HUNG...

FANGS! I'VE GROWN FANGS!

WHEN I GET YOU, HARRY... I'LL *KILL* YOU!

I STOPPED RUNNING! THERE WAS NO NEED TO RUN ANY LONGER! I KNEW WHAT I HAD TO DO! JOAN'S LOVER CAME UP TO ME, LEERING! THEN, HIS EYES WIDENED IN HORROR! I SPRANG AT HIM...

NO... NO! KEEP AWAY!

HE LAY SPRAWLED GROTESQUELY ON THE COBBLESTONES...WHITE AS CHALK! TWO PUNCTURES TRICKLED CLARET ON HIS NECK! HE WAS DEAD! I HAD DRAINED HIS BLOOD...

I...I'M NOT... JUST AN *ORDINARY* BAT...

I'M A *VAMPIRE BAT!*

I FAIRLY FLEW BACK THROUGH THE STREETS TO MY HOUSE...BACK TO JOAN...

DID YOU GET HIM, CHA... *HARRY!* WHAT... WHAT'S *HAPPENED* TO YOU?

I *KILLED* HIM, JOAN!

I KILLED HIM, AS YOU HAD PLANNED TO *KILL ME!* AND NOW I MUST KILL *YOU...TOO...*

NO, HARRY! NO!

HER THROAT WAS WHITE AND SOFT...NOT LIKE HIS! WHEN I HAD FINISHED...

NOW, I'VE GOT TO *GO AWAY*... AND *HIDE*...

I FOUND A PLACE...A NICE QUIET PLACE TO HIDE! IT'S IN THIS COFFIN, IN THIS MAUSOLEUM! WHAT DID I DO WITH THE BODY THAT OCCUPIED IT BEFORE *I* CAME? OH, I BROUGHT IT TO *JOHN... MY FRIEND!* HE MADE *SHORT WORK* OF IT!

THE END...

HEH, HEH! WELL, THAT'S HARRY'S STORY, KIDDIES! PERSONALLY, I THINK HE WAS A LITTLE *BATTY,* DON'T YOU? OH, BY THE WAY! IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY RECEIVED MY 5 BY 7 PICTURE... NOT A DRAWING BUT AN ACTUAL PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRODUCTION AS I APPEAR IN THE FLESH... READ MY COLUMN, *'THE CRYPT-KEEPER'S CORNER'* IN THIS ISSUE! AND NOW I'LL TURN YOU OVER TO THAT BAG, *THE OLD WITCH!*

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HMMPH! NOW THAT YOU HAVE BEEN DULY *BORED* BY THE *CRYPT-KEEPER'S FAIRY TALE*, *I'LL* TELL YOU A *HORROR STORY!* COME CLOSER AND GAZE INTO THE BUBBLING CONTENTS OF MY CAULDRON! GAZE DEEP AND SOON YOU'LL SEE THE FIRST SCENE OF A CHILLING YARN I CALL...

THE LIVING DEATH!

LESTER JEROME AND ARNOLD MANNING HAD BEEN CLOSE FRIENDS ALL THROUGH THE YEARS AT MEDICAL SCHOOL! THEY HAD STUDIED TOGETHER, AND GRADUATED TOGETHER! THEY HAD EVEN INTERNED TOGETHER AT THE SAME HOSPITAL! THEY HAD DONE EVERYTHING TOGETHER! AND, TOGETHER, THEY HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH THE SAME GIRL...

C'MON LAURIE! MAKE UP YOUR MIND! *LESTER* OR *ME!*

WHY NOT... *BOTH* OF YOU?

SAY, THAT'S NOT A BAD IDEA! WE'LL *BOTH* TAKE HER TO THE MOVIES, ARNOLD!

YES! LESTER AND ARNOLD HAD BEGUN THEIR MEDICAL CAREERS TOGETHER! BUT SOON, THEY BEGAN TO DRIFT APART! THEY BEGAN TO DIFFER ON *THEORIES* OF MEDICINE...

I SAY THAT THE *MAJORITY OF ILLNESSES* ARE NOTHING BUT *PRODUCTS OF THE MIND!* THEY ARE *PSYCHOLOGICALLY* INCURRED!

BAH! LESTER, YOU'RE *MAD!* AN *ILLNESS* IS AN *ILLNESS* AND SHOULD BE *TREATED* AS SUCH!

AND SO, LESTER JEROME AND ARNOLD MANNING CAME TO A CROSSROAD AND EACH WENT ■ A DIFFERENT DIRECTION! LESTER TOOK THE PATH OF PSYCHOSOMATIC MEDICINE...THE TREATMENT OF ILLNESSES THROUGH THE MIND, WHILE ARNOLD TOOK THE PATH OF SURGERY...THE TREATMENT OF ILLNESSES BY SCALPEL, NEEDLE, AND PILLS! AND LAURIE...THE GIRL THEY BOTH LOVED... STOOD BETWEEN THEM, TRYING TO MAKE UP HER MIND!

THEN, ONE DAY, ARNOLD MANNING, THE SURGEON, RECEIVED A PHONE CALL FROM LAURIE! HE WENT TO SEE HER...

I...I DON'T HOW TO SAY THIS, ARNOLD, BUT..WELL... LESTER HAS ASKED ME TO MARRY HIM, AND I'VE ACCEPTED! I'M...SORRY!

OH! I SEE! WELL... I HOPE YOU'LL BOTH BE VERY HAPPY TOGETHER!

LAURIE AND LESTER BECAME ENGAGED! THE MONTHS WENT BY AND THE WEDDING DAY DREW NEAR! ABOUT A WEEK BEFORE THE EVENTFUL DAY, LAURIE BECAME VERY SICK! SHE WAS RUSHED TO THE HOSPITAL....

HERE, LESTER! HERE ARE THE X-RAYS! LOOK FOR YOURSELF! SHE HAS A TUMOROUS GROWTH ON HER HEART! AN OPERATION MIGHT SAVE HER LIFE!

MIGHT, YOU SAY! WHAT ARE HER *CHANCES*, ARNOLD!

I...I CAN'T TELL, LESTER! MAYBE ONE CHANCE IN TEN! IT'S A *VERY DELICATE OPERATION!*

THEN I WON'T *ALLOW* YOU TO *PERFORM IT!* *I'LL* SAVE HER THROUGH PSYCHOSOMATIC MEDICINE... *MY WAY!* I'M *SURE* I CAN!

DON'T BE A FOOL, LESTER! *SURGERY* IS THE *ONLY WAY!* YOU *CAN'T* STOP A TUMOR THROUGH ...*PSYCHOLOGY.*

YES! IT'S POSSIBLE! BY *HYPNOTISM.* I'LL *ARREST ITS GROWTH!* AFTER ALL... *GROWTH* IS CONTROLLED BY THE *BRAIN!*

I'M IN CHARGE HERE, DOCTOR JEROME! THERE'S NO TIME FOR YOUR PSYCHOSOMATIC HOG-WASH! LAURIE'S *LIFE* IS AT STAKE.

BUT YOU ADMITTED THAT SHE DOESN'T HAVE MUCH OF A CHANCE!

YES! BUT THERE'S STILL *THAT* CHANCE! I'M *ORDERING* THE OPERATION! I SHALL PERFORM IT *MYSELF!*

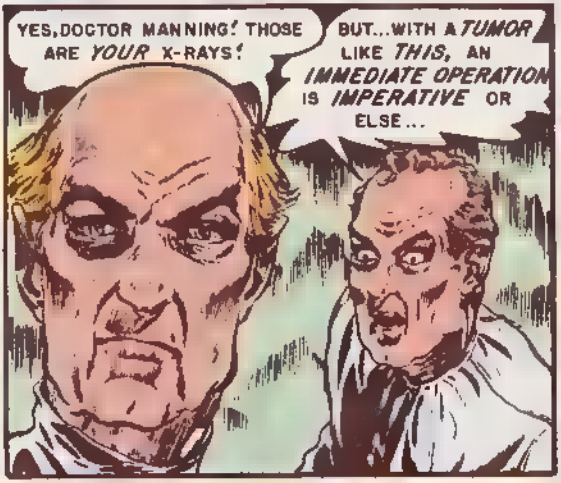
NO! GIVE ■ A TRY! ■EASE!

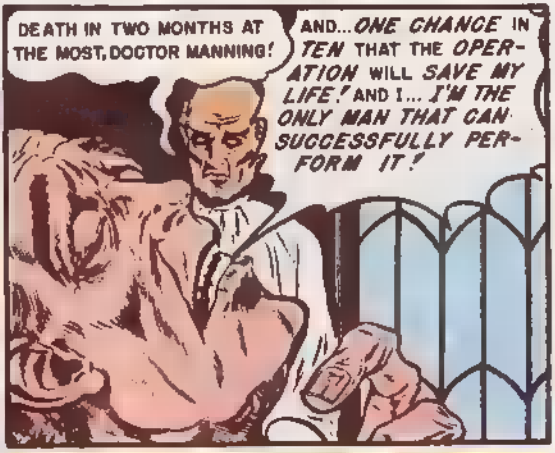
BUT LESTER DIDN'T GET HIS CHANCE! THE HOSPITAL BOARD VOTED HIM DOWN, AND DOCTOR ARNOLD MANNING PERFORMED THE OPERATION! HE DID HIS BEST, BUT...
SHE...SHE DIED, LESTER!
OH LORD! NO... NO!
I COULD HAVE SAVED HER! I COULD HAVE SAVED HER IF YOU HAD GIVEN ME THE CHANCE! YOU KILLED HER, MANNING! YOU...AND YOUR SURGERY!
I...I DID ALL I COULD, LESTER!
NO! YOU COULD HAVE LISTENED TO ME! BUT NO! YOU'RE A SURGEON! OPERATE! CUT! THAT'S ALL YOU KNOW!
WELL, I'LL SHOW YOU, DOCTOR MANNING! SOMEDAY, I'LL CONVINCE YOU THAT I WAS RIGHT!
PERHAPS, DOCTOR JEROME! PERHAPS... BUT I DOUBT IT!
AND SO THE YEARS PASSED! DOCTOR ARNOLD MANNING BECAME A WORLD FAMOUS SURGEON, WHILE DOCTOR LESTER JEROME REMAINED AN OBSCURE PSYCHOSOMATIC PHYSICIAN...
DOC JEROME? I WOULDN'T GO TO HIM ON A BET! HE DON'T GIVE YOU PILLS OR NOTHIN'! JUST HYPNOTIZES YOU...PSYCHOANALYZES YOU...
THE GUY OUGHT TO BE PSYCHOANALYZED HIMSELF! HE'S NUTS!
ONE DAY, WHILE DOCTOR ARNOLD MANNING WAS PERFORMING A ROUTINE OPERATION...
DOCTOR MANNING! WHAT IS IT?
I...GASP...CAN'T SEE! EVERYTHING... IS BLURRED! T-TAKE OVER...DOCTOR...
DOCTOR MANNING SLUMPED TO THE FLOOR, UNCONSCIOUS. HIS ASSISTANT TOOK OVER WHILE THEY CARRIED DOCTOR MANNING OUT OF THE OPERATING ROOM TO A HOSPITAL BED...
PUPILS DILATED... NO PAIN REACTION! GET HIM TO X-RAY... AT ONCE!
DOCTOR! YOU MEAN...
3

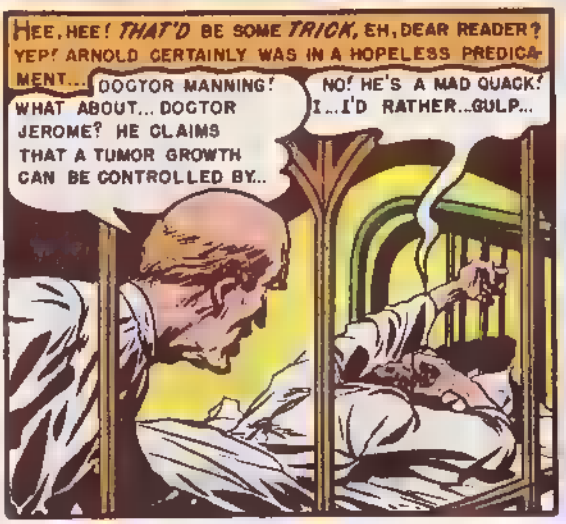
YES! IT LOOKS LIKE... A BRAIN TUMOR!
GIVE ME X-RAY! IMMEDIATELY!

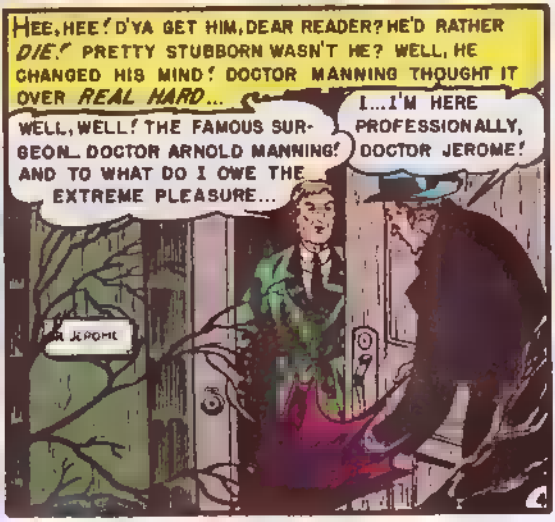
SEVERAL HOURS LATER, DR. MANNING REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS! WHEN HE LOOKED AROUND...
YOU COLLAPSED WHILE OPERATING, DOCTOR! HOW DO YOU FEEL?
I HAVE A SEVERE HEADACHE! WHAT... WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?

HERE, DOCTOR MANNING! LOOK AT THESE X-RAYS!
CEREBRAL TUMOR! FRONTAL LOBE PRESSURE! THIS MAN IS... IS... NO!


YES, DOCTOR MANNING! THOSE ARE YOUR X-RAYS!
BUT... WITH A TUMOR LIKE THIS, AN IMMEDIATE OPERATION IS IMPERATIVE OR ELSE...


DEATH IN TWO MONTHS AT THE MOST, DOCTOR MANNING!
AND... ONE CHANCE IN TEN THAT THE OPERATION WILL SAVE MY LIFE! AND I... I'M THE ONLY MAN THAT CAN SUCCESSFULLY PERFORM IT!


HEE, HEE! THAT'D BE SOME TRICK, EH, DEAR READER? YEP! ARNOLD CERTAINLY WAS IN A HOPELESS PREDICAMENT...
DOCTOR MANNING! WHAT ABOUT... DOCTOR JEROME? HE CLAIMS THAT A TUMOR GROWTH CAN BE CONTROLLED BY...
NO! HE'S A MAD QUACK! I... I'D RATHER... GULP...


HEE, HEE! D'YA GET HIM, DEAR READER? HE'D RATHER DIE! PRETTY STUBBORN WASN'T HE? WELL, HE CHANGED HIS MIND! DOCTOR MANNING THOUGHT IT OVER REAL HARD...
WELL, WELL! THE FAMOUS SURGEON... DOCTOR ARNOLD MANNING! AND TO WHAT DO I OWE THE EXTREME PLEASURE...
I... I'M HERE PROFESSIONALLY, DOCTOR JEROME!
R. JEROME

DOCTOR LESTER JEROME STEPPED ASIDE AND DOCTOR ARNOLD MANNING ENTERED THE NEAT WHITE OFFICE! ONCE INSIDE, HE EXPLAINED TO DOCTOR JEROME THE REASON FOR HIS VISIT! DOCTOR LESTER JEROME LISTENED QUIETLY, AND THEN...WHEN DOCTOR MANNING HAD FINISHED... BURST OUT LAUGHING!

SO! THE SKEPTICAL DOCTOR MANNING TURNS TO *PSYCHO-SOMATIC MEDICINE* AS A LAST RESORT, EH? NOW, YOU RELUCTANTLY AGREE TO GIVE ME A CHANCE, EH?

DO NOT LAUGH, LESTER!

WHY SHOULDN'T I LAUGH, ARNOLD? WHEN *LAURIE* STOOD BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH, I WAS A *QUACK*... A *CHARLATAN!* BUT NOW, WHEN *YOUR* LIFE IS AT STAKE... YOU COME RUNNING! WELL... I CANNOT REFUSE YOU! IN FACT, IT WILL GIVE ME GREAT PLEASURE TO *PROVE* THAT I AM CORRECT...

LESTER LED ARNOLD MANNING INTO A DIMLY LIT ROOM! HE SEATED HIM IN A COMFORTABLE CHAIR AND TRAINED A SPOTLIGHT ON HIS EYES...

WHAT...WHAT IF I SHOULD *DIE* WHILE UNDER YOUR HYPNOTIC TRANCE, LESTER?

YOU WILL NOT DIE, ARNOLD! I'LL SEE TO *THAT!*

SOON DOCTOR ARNOLD MANNING'S EYES GREW HEAVY! UNDER THE SPELL OF DOCTOR LESTER'S SOFT SOOTHING TONES, ARNOLD FELL INTO A DEEP HYPNOTIC SLEEP...

...YOU WILL REMAIN IN THIS STATE UNTIL I UTTER THE WORD 'LAURIE' THEN YOU WILL AWAKE! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

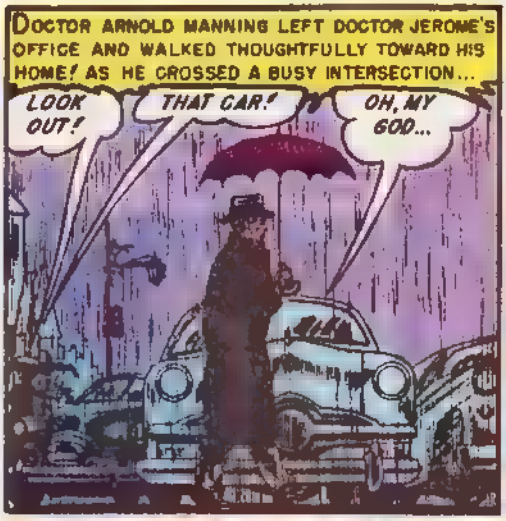
I... UNDER... STAND...

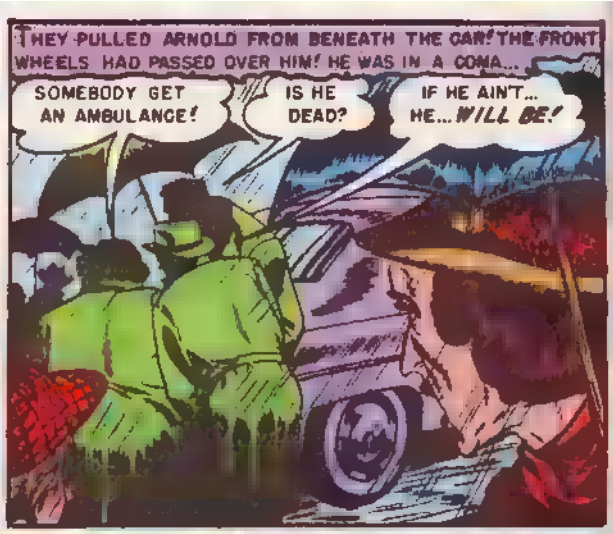
...AND WHILE YOU ARE IN THIS HYPNOTIC TRANCE, ARNOLD...YOU *WILL NOT DIE!* REMEMBER! *YOU WILL NOT DIE...*

I..WILL... NOT...DIE...

NOW OPEN YOUR EYES! YOU WILL SPEAK AND ACT NORMALLY WHILE YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS MIND REMAINS HYPNOTIZED! YOU ARE FREE TO GO! COME BACK IN TWO DAYS!

THANK YOU, DOCTOR JEROME!

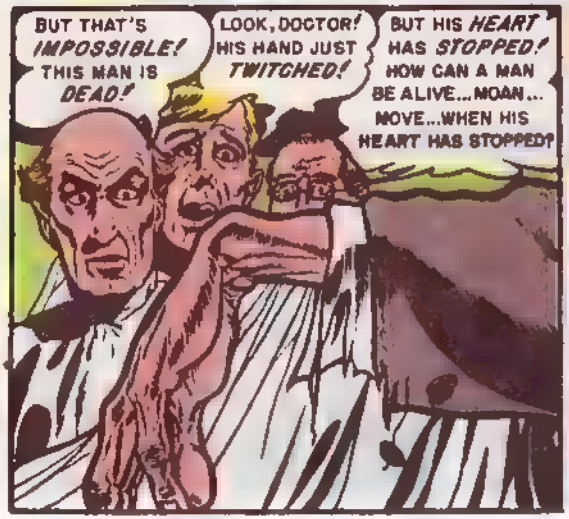

DOCTOR ARNOLD MANNING LEFT DOCTOR JEROME'S OFFICE AND WALKED THOUGHTFULLY TOWARD HIS HOME! AS HE CROSSED A BUSY INTERSECTION...
LOOK OUT!
THAT CAR!
OH, MY GOD...

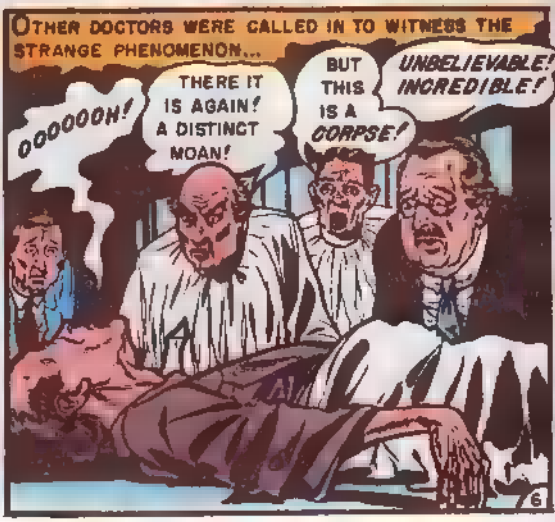

THEY PULLED ARNOLD FROM BENEATH THE CAR! THE FRONT WHEELS HAD PASSED OVER HIM! HE WAS IN A COMA...
SOMEBODY GET AN AMBULANCE!
IS HE DEAD?
IF HE AIN'T... HE... WILL BE!

THE WAIL OF THE AMBULANCE SIREN SCREAMED THROUGH THE CITY AS ARNOLD MANNING WAS RUSHED TO THE HOSPITAL...
IT'S... MANNING!
GOOD LORD! HE'S BEEN RUN OVER!

A HASTY EXAMINATION FOLLOWED.
HE...HE'S DEAD! HIS HEART HAS STOPPED BEATING!
WHEEL HIM INTO THE HOSPITAL MORGUE...

OOOOOOH!
WHAT THE...?
HE MOANED!


BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! THIS MAN IS DEAD!
LOOK, DOCTOR! HIS HAND JUST TWITCHED!
BUT HIS HEART HAS STOPPED! HOW CAN A MAN BE ALIVE...MOAN... MOVE...WHEN HIS HEART HAS STOPPED?


OTHER DOCTORS WERE CALLED IN TO WITNESS THE STRANGE PHENOMENON...
OOOOOOH!
THERE IT IS AGAIN! A DISTINCT MOAN!
BUT THIS IS A CORPSE!
UNBELIEVABLE! INCREDIBLE!

WHEN DOCTOR MANNING DID NOT RETURN TO DOCTOR JEROME'S OFFICE IN TWO DAYS, LESTER INQUIRED AT THE HOSPITAL AND LEARNED ABOUT THE ACCIDENT...

AND ALTHOUGH HE IS *DEAD*, HE *MOVES*... *GROANS!* HE DOES NOT *DECAY!*

GENTLEMEN! I CAN EXPLAIN...

DOCTOR MANNING CAME TO ME! HE ASKED ME TO CURE A TUMOR BY *HYPNOTISM!* I PUT HIM IN A TRANCE AND ASSURED HIM THAT HE *WOULD NOT DIE WHILE IN THIS HYPNOTIC STATE!* SO...HE *CANNOT DIE* UNTIL *I RELEASE HIM!* NOR WILL HE *DECAY* OR *TAKE ON ANY OF DEATH'S CHARACTERISTICS!*

POPPY-COOK! FOOLISHNESS!

RIDICULOUS!

OH! YOU DOUBT ME! THEN *YOU* FIGURE IT OUT, GENTLEMEN! GOOD DAY!

A MONTH WENT BY! THEN TWO MONTHS! DOCTOR ARNOLD MANNING REMAINED IN THE SAME CONDITION! THEN, ONE DAY, THE HOSPITAL SUMMONED DOCTOR LESTER JEROME...

YESTERDAY, DOCTOR MANNING REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS! WE X-RAYED AND FOUND THAT HIS CEREBRAL TUMOR HAS ALMOST ENTIRELY DISAPPEARED! HIS HEART STILL DOES NOT BEAT! HE ASKED FOR YOU! HE IS IN TERRIFIC PAIN!

GOOD! TAKE ME TO HIM!

DOCTOR LESTER JEROME SMILED AT THE WRITHING ARNOLD MANNING...

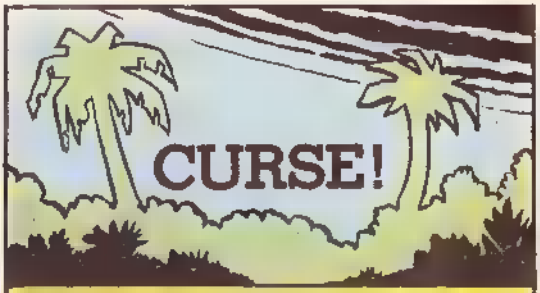
HELP...ME...LESTER! THE...PAIN...MY...HEART! DO...SOMETHING! THEY... TELL ME...THAT...BY ALL...MEDICAL STANDARDS...I AM...DEAD!

YES, ARNOLD! YOU'VE BEEN DEAD FOR ALMOST THREE MONTHS! I'VE KEPT YOU FROM DECAYING THROUGH HYPNOSIS! YOUR TUMOR IS GONE, TOO! YOU SEE... *I COULD HAVE SAVED LAURIE*... I... WHAT...THE...

DOCTOR LESTER JEROME HAD UTTERED THE WORD 'LAURIE'...THE WORD THAT WOULD RELEASE ARNOLD MANNING FROM HIS HYPNOTIC TRANCE! AS THE GATHERED DOCTORS WATCHED, HORRIFIED, ARNOLD FELL BACK LIMPLY ON THE BED! HIS SKIN SHRIVELED, AND TURNED FROM PINK TO BLUE TO A SICKENING BROWN! HIS EYES SUNK DEEP INTO HIS HEAD! THEN THEY BECAME HOLLOW BLACK SOCKETS! THE FLESH...ROTTED AND STINKING... FELL FROM HIS BONES! SOON, THE BED WAS COVERED WITH NOTHING BUT A SEETHING, OOZING MASS OF PUTRID AND DECAYED FLESH...

HEE, HEE! SO ARNOLD FINALLY *CAUGHT UP* WITH HIMSELF! WHAT WAS *LEFT* OF HIMSELF, ANYWAY! WELL...HOW LONG CAN A DEAD MAN FIGHT OFF *DECAY*, EH? IT'S BOUND TO *WEAR YOU DOWN* SOONER OR LATER! OF COURSE WITH ARNOLD IT HAD TO MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME! TOO BAD ARNOLD DIDN'T LISTEN TO LESTER, ANYWAY! MAYBE HE WOULDN'T HAVE MADE SUCH A *MASS* OF HIMSELF! BYE, NOW! I'LL TURN YOU OVER TO THAT PURVEYOR OF FAIRY TALES... *THE VAULT-KEEPER!*

OH, BY THE WAY! IF YOU WANT A PHOTO OF ME IN THE FLESH, READ THE CRYPT-KEEPER'S CORNER!



He patted the gun-holster at his side; it reassured him and he pressed on through the matted undergrowth of the jungle. It couldn't be much further, he reflected . . . according to the map the site was a mile east of the River of Doom.

Imagine those idiots back in Port Au Prince, he chuckled, as he hacked his way forward. Isn't it just like these Haitians . . . falling for every VooDoo story they hear! They're positive that a fortune in jewels is hidden in this crumbling dump, yet no one has the guts to trek through the jungle after it, just because there's supposed to be a deadly curse on the house where the stuff is hidden! He patted the heavy revolver at his side once again. His gun would take care of any curse careless enough to try to keep him from getting his hands on that treasure! Let the *Haitians* beware of the curse they dreaded . . . the gun at his hip made *him* safe from this outlandish VooDoo superstition!

The clearing opened with unexpected suddenness in front of him, and under the dripping centuries-old trees he saw the dilapidated house they had described to him. It *was* ghostly, with that vapor seeming to rise from its sides, he thought, moving cautiously toward the sagging front door and into the dank building. He froze in his tracks immediately. Someone was seated in a chair in the center of the floor, staring off into the murkiness of the room. Quietly, taking great pains not to make a sound, he drew the revolver from its holster, took aim and fired at point-blank range.

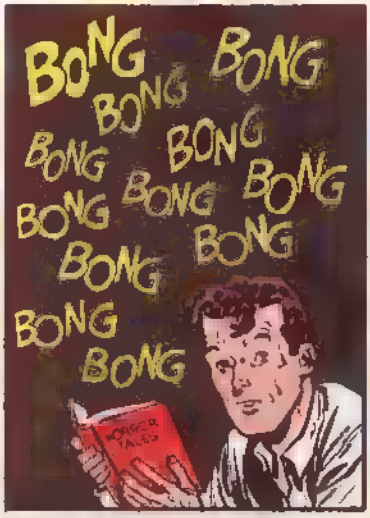
Three shots rang out, and he smiled grimly as he moved toward the crumbling cabinets along one of the walls. He wasn't considered a deadshot for nothing! He hadn't expected to find anybody sitting here and guarding that fortune in jewels . . . but he had taken care of whoever it was, anyway! The curse be damned!

The cabinets were full of sparkling jewels . . . there was a king's ransom tucked away in this hovel, his for the taking! Suddenly the floor creaked behind him and he whirled, his hand gripping the revolver. The chair in which he had left his victim . . . it was *empty!* And by the glittering light of the gems he could see that there was no pool of blood where there should have been one! His head moved slightly as he slipped the safety catch on his revolver and he saw approaching . . . slowly, ominously, as if there was all eternity to accomplish its task . . . a being with the bloodless look of something long dead! Twice he fired the gun, almost convulsively . . . and still the creature kept advancing, never wavering, never altering its funereal pace!

In the next instant the truth burst in upon him in a wave of panic. This curse he had heard whispered about at Port Au Prince . . . it was one of the *Walking Dead!* THAT was why no one would accompany him on his trek . . . they knew that bullets were pathetically useless against one of the dreaded creatures!

And now the curse was reaching out and touching him, and a chill such as he had never before felt was moving down his body. It was all over, he knew, in his last moment of consciousness! He had been claimed, body and soul, by a *ZOMBIE!*

THE VAULT OF HORROR!

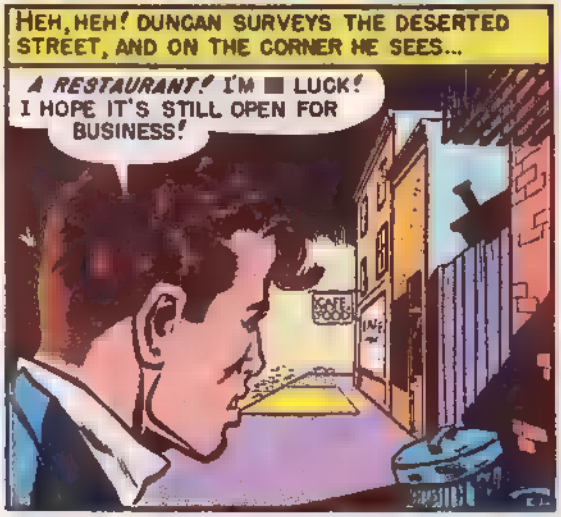

BONG BONG BONG BONG BONG BONG BONG BONG BONG BONG BONG

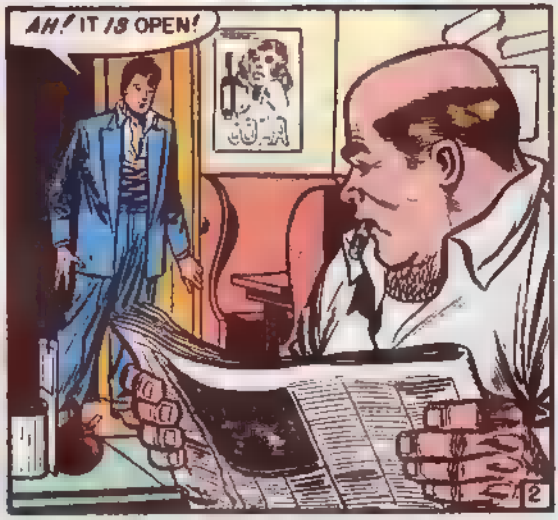
MIDNIGHT! BRR-R! THESE HORROR STORIES (YAWN-N) CERTAINLY GIVE A PERSON GOOSE-PIMPLES!

...OUGHT TO GO TO BED! (YAWN-N-N) FEEL TIRED! BUT MAYBE I BETTER HAVE A SNACK FIRST! DIDN'T REALIZE I WAS SO *HUNGRY!* (YAWN!)

HEY! WHAT THE? HOW THE DEVIL DID I GET *HERE!* LAST THING I REMEMBER, I... OH, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? I *WANT* TO BE HERE! SOMETHING TELLS ME I *SHOULD* BE HERE!

BOY! I'M SO *HUNGRY*, MY STOMACH *HURTS!* I BETTER GET SOME *FOOD!*

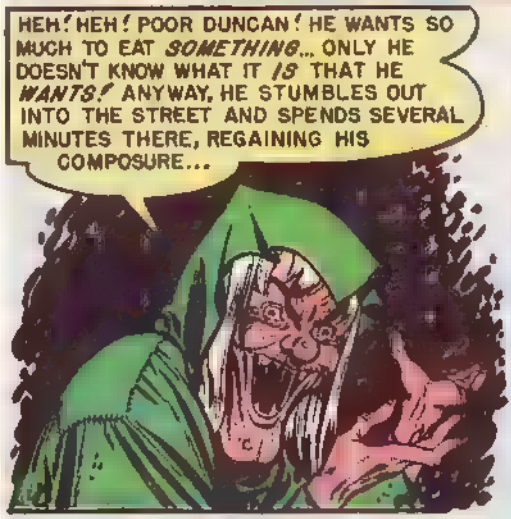

HEH, HEH! DUNCAN SURVEYS THE DESERTED STREET, AND ON THE CORNER HE SEES...
A RESTAURANT! I'M ■ LUCK! I HOPE IT'S STILL OPEN FOR BUSINESS!

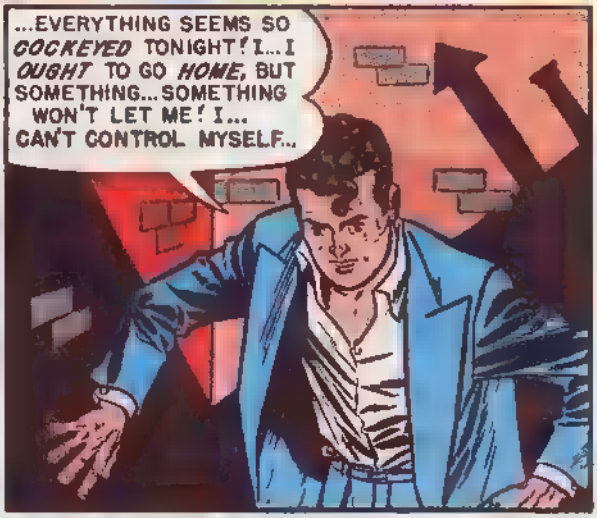

AH! IT *IS* OPEN!

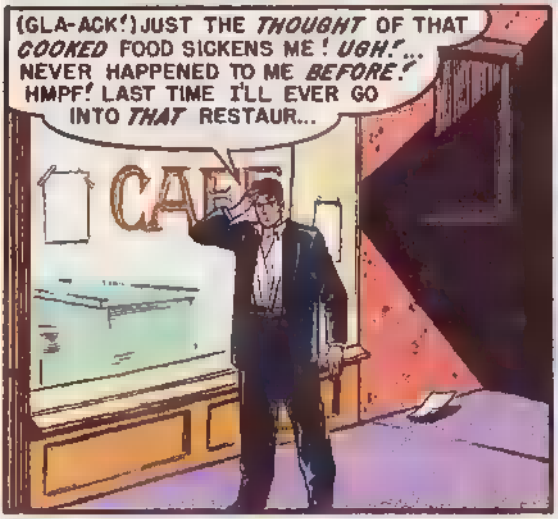
YES, SIR? WHAT'LL IT BE?
...LET'S SEE! I'LL HAVE... ER... I'LL...
SNIFF! SNIFF!
UGH! WHAT A SICKENING ODOR!

...SIZZLING HAMBURGERS THAT... THAT BACON FRYING! I'M... I'M SO HUNGRY! SO HUNGRY, AND YET... THE SMELL OF FOOD COOKING MAKES ME ILL!

WELL, MISTER, WHAT'LL IT BE?
...CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT! THAT COOKED MEAT IS... MAKING ME NAUSEOUS!


HEH! HEH! POOR DUNCAN! HE WANTS SO MUCH TO EAT SOMETHING... ONLY HE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT HE WANTS! ANYWAY, HE STUMBLES OUT INTO THE STREET AND SPENDS SEVERAL MINUTES THERE, REGAINING HIS COMPOSURE...


...EVERYTHING SEEMS SO COCKEYED TONIGHT! I... I OUGHT TO GO HOME, BUT SOMETHING... SOMETHING WON'T LET ME! I... CAN'T CONTROL MYSELF...


(GLA-ACK!) JUST THE THOUGHT OF THAT COOKED FOOD SICKENS ME! UGH!... NEVER HAPPENED TO ME BEFORE! HMPF! LAST TIME I'LL EVER GO INTO THAT RESTAUR...
CAFE

...GEE! I... I FEEL ...DIZZY! AWFULLY DIZZY! FEEL LIKE I'M... GOING TO PASS OUT...

BLACKNESS CLOUDS HIS EYES AND MIND! HE FEELS HIMSELF FLOATING IN A WHIRLING VOID... AND THEN, SUDDENLY, IT IS OVER...

WHAT TH...? A CEMETERY! HOW DID I GET HERE..? WHERE'S THE RESTAURANT? AND THIS *SHOVEL!* HOW DID I GET THIS *SHOVEL?*

CEMETERY

AGAINST HIS WILL, HE ENTERS THE CEMETERY AND GOES FROM ONE GRAVE TO ANOTHER...

WHAT AM I *DOING?* WHAT AM I *LOOKING* FOR? HAVE I GONE *CRAZY? WAIT!* THIS *GRAVE!* A RECENT ONE!

NOW I KNOW WHY I HAVE THIS SHOVEL! BECAUSE I HAVE TO *DIG UP* THIS...THIS *GRAVE! THIS BRAND NEW GRAVE!*

BEWILDERED, AND DRIVEN BY A FURY HE CANNOT RESIST, DUNCAN AGAIN AND AGAIN DIGS DEEPER INTO THE EARTH!

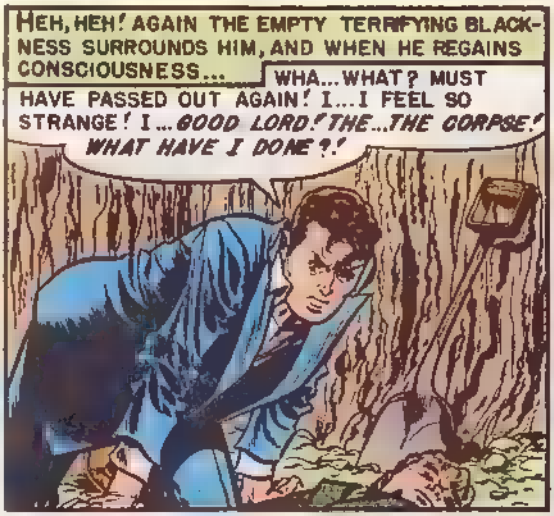
FINALLY, THE COFFIN IS BARED, THE LID RAISED...

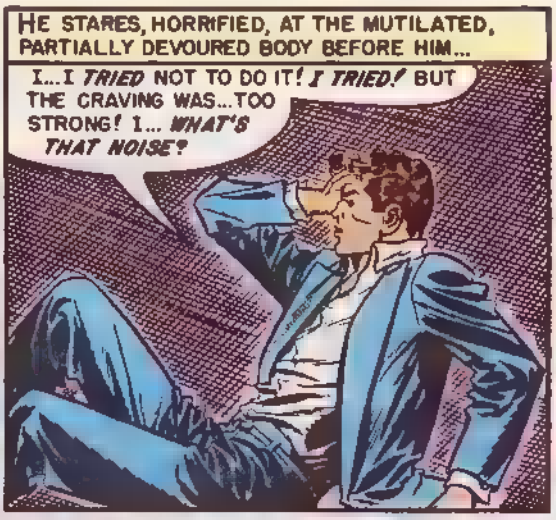
AH! HERE IT IS! HERE IS WHAT I'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR ALL EVENING!

SUDDENLY, A SPARK OF REALIZATION SEEPS INTO HIS CONCIOUSNESS... A REALIZATION OF WHAT HE IS ABOUT TO DO!

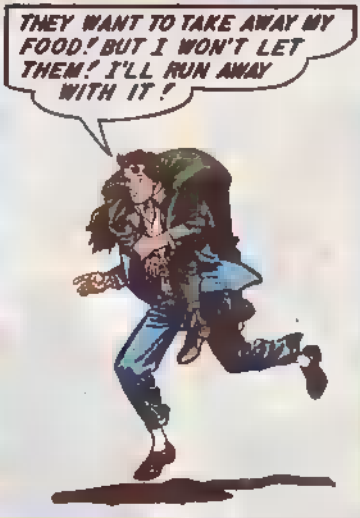
GOOD LORD! I..I MUST BE INSANE! WANTING TO...TO...NO! *NO! DON'T LET ME DO IT!*

OH, *PLEASE! PLEASE! DON'T MAKE ME DO IT!* BUT...BUT I...*HAVE* TO... SOMETHING'S *FORCING ME TO*...OH-H... I...I FEEL..DIZZY AGAIN...

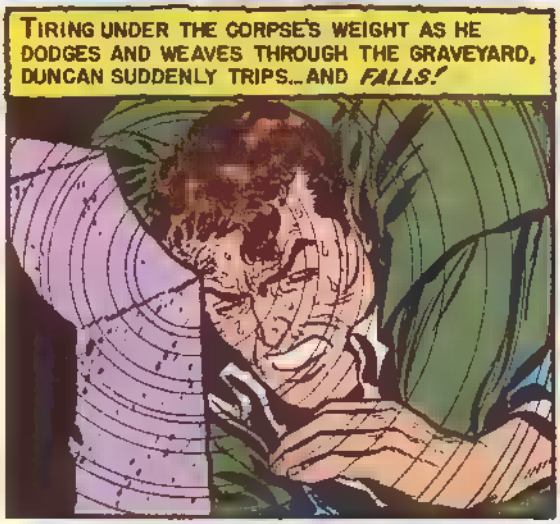

HEH, HEH! AGAIN THE EMPTY TERRIFYING BLACKNESS SURROUNDS HIM, AND WHEN HE REGAINS CONSCIOUSNESS...
WHA...WHAT? MUST HAVE PASSED OUT AGAIN! I...I FEEL SO STRANGE! I...GOOD LORD! THE...THE CORPSE! WHAT HAVE I DONE?!

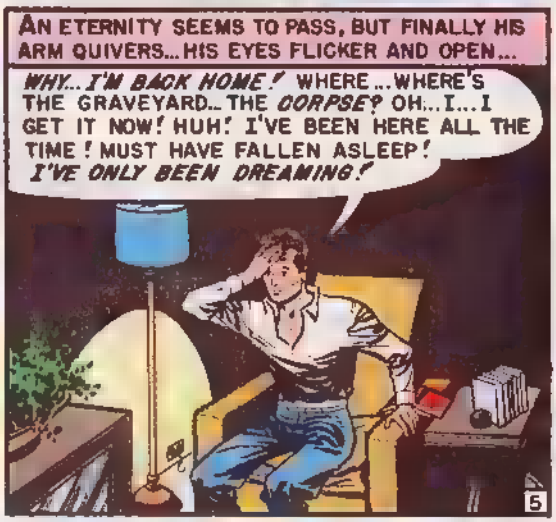

HE STARES, HORRIFIED, AT THE MUTILATED, PARTIALLY DEVOURED BODY BEFORE HIM...
I...I TRIED NOT TO DO IT! I TRIED! BUT THE CRAVING WAS...TOO STRONG! I... WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

PEOPLE! A CROWD OF PEOPLE... WITH TORCHES! THEY'RE AFTER ME... COMING THIS WAY!


THEY WANT TO TAKE AWAY MY FOOD! BUT I WON'T LET THEM! I'LL RUN AWAY WITH IT!

THEY'VE SEEN ME!...HAVE TO RUN FASTER! I'LL HIDE MY FOOD! MUSTN'T LET THEM CATCH ME!


TIRING UNDER THE CORPSE'S WEIGHT AS HE DODGES AND WEAVES THROUGH THE GRAVEYARD, DUNCAN SUDDENLY TRIPS...AND FALLS!

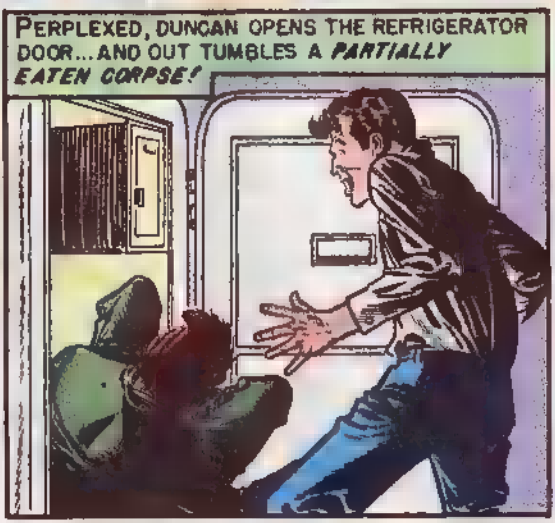

AN ETERNITY SEEMS TO PASS, BUT FINALLY HIS ARM QUIVERS...HIS EYES FLICKER AND OPEN...
WHY...I'M BACK HOME! WHERE...WHERE'S THE GRAVEYARD...THE CORPSE? OH...I...I GET IT NOW! HUH! I'VE BEEN HERE ALL THE TIME! MUST HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP! I'VE ONLY BEEN DREAMING!

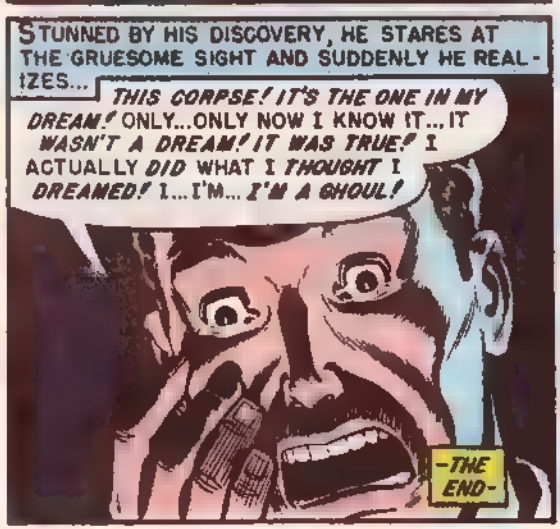
WHOOSH! WHAT A NIGHT-MARE THAT WAS! DREAMING I WAS A GHOUL! UGH! HOW FANTASTIC! LAST TIME I'LL EVER READ HORROR STORIES BEFORE GOING TO BED!
HORROR TALES

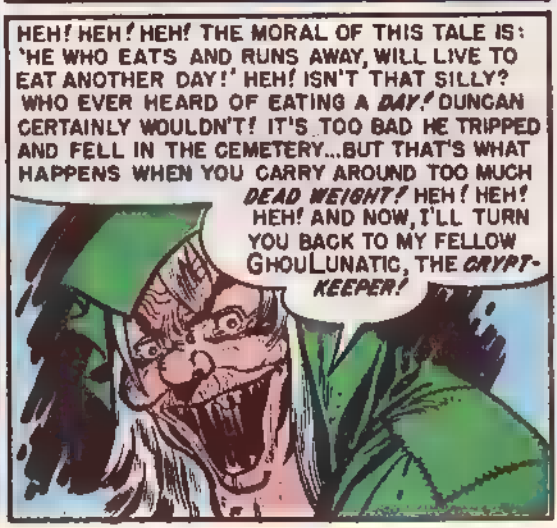
SAY, IT'S LATE! MUST HAVE DOZED FOR SEVERAL HOURS! HO-HUM, GUESS I'LL FIX SOME COFFEE AND HIT THE SACK!

NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT THAT DREAM I HAVE TO LAUGH! NEVER THOUGHT HORROR TALES WOULD AFFECT... SAY... WHAT THE...?
CLICK!

THAT'S STRANGE! WHAT ARE ALL THE SHELVES AND FOOD FROM THE REFRIGERATOR DOING ON THE TABLE? I DON'T REMEMBER PUTTING THEM THERE!
SALMON
CHEESE


PERPLEXED, DUNCAN OPENS THE REFRIGERATOR DOOR... AND OUT TUMBLES A PARTIALLY EATEN CORPSE!

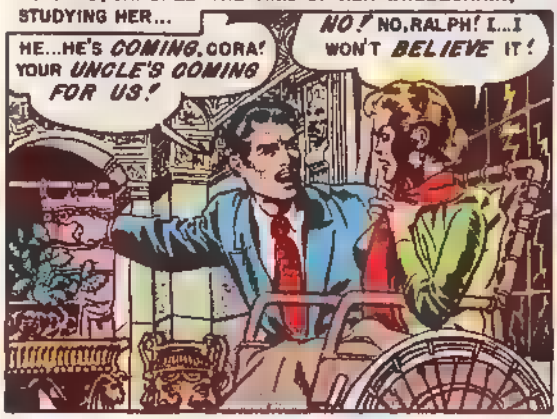

STUNNED BY HIS DISCOVERY, HE STARES AT THE GRUESOME SIGHT AND SUDDENLY HE REALIZES...
THIS CORPSE! IT'S THE ONE IN MY DREAM! ONLY...ONLY NOW I KNOW IT... IT WASN'T A DREAM! IT WAS TRUE! I ACTUALLY DID WHAT I THOUGHT I DREAMED! I... I'M... I'M A GHOUL!
-THE END-


HEH! HEH! HEH! THE MORAL OF THIS TALE IS: 'HE WHO EATS AND RUNS AWAY, WILL LIVE TO EAT ANOTHER DAY!' HEH! ISN'T THAT SILLY? WHO EVER HEARD OF EATING A DAY! DUNCAN CERTAINLY WOULDN'T! IT'S TOO BAD HE TRIPPED AND FELL IN THE CEMETERY...BUT THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CARRY AROUND TOO MUCH DEAD WEIGHT! HEH! HEH! HEH! AND NOW, I'LL TURN YOU BACK TO MY FELLOW GHOULUNATIC, THE CRYPT-KEEPER!

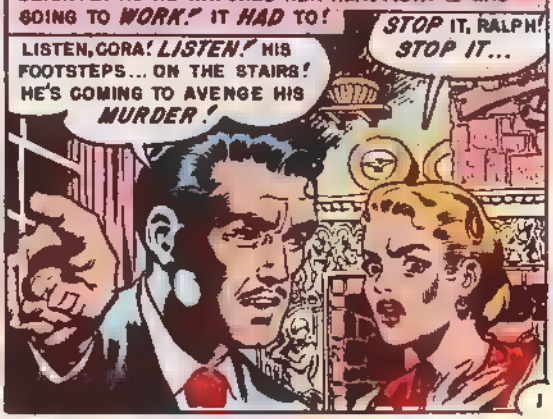
It was a diabolical plot! Ralph was sure Cora would be...

SCARED TO DEATH!

CORA CLUTCHED HER SHAWL TIGHTLY AROUND HER THROAT AND STARED HORRIFIED INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE HALLWAY OUTSIDE HER ROOM! RALPH, HER HUSBAND, GRASPED THE ARM OF HER WHEELCHAIR, STUDYING HER...



CORA'S FACE WAS WET WITH PERSPIRATION! HER HAND TREMBLED... THE KNUCKLES WHITENED... AS SHE DREW HER SHAWL PROTECTIVELY ABOUT HER! RALPH SMILED SLIGHTLY AS HE WATCHED HER REACTION! IT WAS GOING TO WORK! IT HAD TO!



TEARS FILLED CORA'S EYES! THEY SPILLED OVER THE RIM OF HER EYELIDS AND RAN CRAZILY DOWN HER CHEEKS! SHE BEGAN TO SOB... HEAVING SOBS THAT WRACKED HER BODY AND SHIFTED HER WHEELCHAIR.

REMEMBER, CORA? REMEMBER THE NIGHT WE... *KILLED HIM?*

CORA GASPED! RALPH CHUCKLED TO HIMSELF! POOR CORA! 'ONE MORE HEART ATTACK WILL SURELY KILL HER!', THE DOCTOR HAD TOLD RALPH...

REMEMBER, CORA? WE DID IT...FOR HIS *MONEY!*

P...PLEASE, RALPH! SOB... SOB...PLEASE... DON'T...

AS RALPH WATCHED CORA, HIS THOUGHTS WENT BACK... BACK OVER THE LONG MONTHS TO THE BEGINNING! IT HAD ALL STARTED AT A COCKTAIL PARTY GIVEN BY HER UNCLE IN CORA'S HONOR...

REALLY, FRANK! I FEEL TERRIBLE ABOUT THIS! COMING TO A PARTY WITHOUT AN INVITATION!

FORGET IT, RALPH! CORA'S UNCLE DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE VISITING ME!

YES, BUT...

SHHHH! HERE HE COMES NOW!

AH! FRANK! GLAD YOU CAME! WHO'S YOUR FRIEND?

OH, THIS IS RALPH KEARNS! HE'S FROM NEW YORK! I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF BRINGING HIM ALONG TO YOUR NIECE'S PARTY! I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND!

NONSENSE! HOW DO YOU DO, RALPH? I'M CORA'S UNCLE, ALEX WEATHERBY! GLAD TO HAVE YOU!

RALPH SMILED TO HIMSELF AS HE WATCHED CORA SQUIRM IN HER WHEELCHAIR! YES! THAT WAS WHEN HE HAD FIRST MET HER...

HEY, FRANK! WHO'S THE PRETTY ONE...

THAT'S YOUR HOSTESS, CORA WEATHERBY! SHE GETS *ALL THIS* WHEN THE OLD GEEZER CROAKS! SOLE HEIR...

SOLE HEIR! ALL OF ALEX WEATHERBY'S WEALTH WOULD BE CORA'S SOME DAY! SUDDENLY IT HAD COME TO RALPH... THE WHOLE PLAN...

WELL, FRANK! YOU'RE SOME PAL! AREN'T YOU GOING TO INTRODUCE ME?

OH, YEAH! SURE, RALPH! C'MON! *CORA...*

THERE WAS A NOISE BELOW! CORA JUMPED...GASPING FOR BREATH! RALPH EYED HER...HER CHALK-WHITE SKIN...HER WRINKLED FOREHEAD! SHE WASN'T PRETTY ...NOT ANYMORE! NOT AS SHE HAD BEEN WHEN HE HAD FIRST ASKED...

WILL YOU MARRY ME, CORA? I KNOW WE'VE ONLY KNOWN EACH OTHER A SHORT TIME, YET...

OH, RALPH! DO YOU REALLY *WANT* ME?

AGAIN RALPH LAUGHED SILENTLY! CORA...ALWAYS THE PUSHOVER! LIKE NOW...CRINGING...SHAKING! THE SILLY FOOL! HE HAD WANTED HER *UNCLE'S MONEY...NOT HER...*

THEN...YOU...YOU'LL SAY 'YES'?

OF COURSE, DARLING! OF COURSE I'LL MARRY YOU!

NOT THAT CORA HAD BEEN SO BAD TO LOOK AT BACK THEN! YET, TO RALPH... EXPERIENCED, WORLDLY, SUAVE... THE MONEY HAD SEEMED SO MUCH *MORE* ATTRACTIVE...

OH, CORA...

RALPH! I'M SO HAPPY...

THE WIND OUTSIDE CORA'S BEDROOM WHISTLED THROUGH THE TREES! ANOTHER NOISE... ANOTHER GASP! RALPH WATCHED HER CLOSELY. SHE WAS BREATHING HEAVIER NOW...PAINFULLY...

WHAT WAS THAT, CORA? ANOTHER FOOTSTEP... ON THE STAIRS...

NO...GASP! I WON'T... IT *CAN'T* BE...

AND THEN THE WEDDING! RALPH ESPECIALLY REMEMBERED THE WEDDING! HOW HE HAD SLIPPED THE RING ON HER FINGER...SAYING THE WORDS... BUT THINKING...

WITH THIS RING, I THEE WED...

...YOU AND YOUR INHERITANCE!

AH, THE HONEYMOON! THE CRUISE TO EUROPE...ON THE OLD MAN'S MONEY...

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL MOON TONIGHT! LOVE ME, DARLING?

WITH ALL MY HEART, CORA!

S.S. PINAFORE

AND THEN THOSE ROTTEN MONTHS AT THE PLANT! *WORKING, LIKE ANY OTHER LABORER, IN THE OLD MAN'S PLANT...*

GOT TO START AT THE BOTTOM, SON! SOMEDAY THIS PLANT WILL BE CORA'S...AND YOU'LL HAVE TO RUN IT...

OF COURSE, UNCLE ALEX! I UNDERSTAND! I *WANT* TO LEARN...

WANTED IT! RALPH HAD HATED IT! HATED EVERYTHING ABOUT IT! AND THEN IT HAD COME TO HIM! THE PERFECT SOLUTION...

OF COURSE! WHAT A FOOL I'VE BEEN! WHY...WHY WAIT TILL THE OLD GEEZER DIES? WHY NOT... HELP HIM?

PROCRASTINATION IS THE THIEF OF TIME

NO SMOKING

YES! THE NEXT FEW MONTHS HAD BEEN TOUGH ON RALPH! HE HAD HAD TO BE ON HIS TOES! CONVINCING CORA WASN'T EASY...

...AND THEN, IN FRONT OF THE MEN, HE INSULTED ME...CALLED ME INCOMPETENT ... A NUMSKULL!

OH, RALPH, DARLING! I'M SO SORRY! I'LL...I'LL SPEAK TO HIM...

IT HAD TAKEN PATIENCE...AND INGENUITY...

NO, CORA! I'LL FIGHT MY OWN BATTLES!

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND HIS ACTIONS! I REALLY CAN'T!

HE HAD HAD TO USE CAREFUL TIMING...PSYCHOLOGY...

...CALLED ME A GOLD-DIGGER! ACCUSED ME OF MARRYING YOU FOR YOUR INHERITANCE!

NO! THE HATEFUL OLD...

YES! AND THEN HE SAID THAT HE'D CUT YOU OUT OF HIS WILL! HE ACCUSED YOU OF THE SAME THING... THAT ALL YOU CARED ABOUT WAS HIS MONEY!

LET HIM! HE'S NOTHING BUT A BITTER CROTCHETY OLD SKINFLINT!

A PUSHOVER...THAT'S WHAT CORA HAD ALWAYS BEEN! AT FIRST SHE HAD VIOLENTLY OBJECTED, BUT SOON ... SHE HAD RELUCTANTLY AGREED...

WHY NOT? IT'S YOUR MONEY, RIGHTFULLY! HE'S OLD! HE'S LIVED HIS LIFE! IT'LL BE EASY...

ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! WE'LL KILL HIM!

AND SO, ONE NIGHT, AS OLD UNCLE ALEX WEATHERBY HAD BEEN STROLLING NEAR THE POND ON HIS VAST ESTATE...

THEY HAD PUT HIM, UNCONSCIOUS, FACE DOWN IN THE POND...

IT'LL LOOK LIKE HE *FELL*...STRUCK HIS HEAD...AND *DROWNED!*

OH, RALPH! I... SOB... I'M *AFRAID!*

LATER THAT NIGHT THEY HAD CALLED THE POLICE...

YES! HE WENT OUT ABOUT THREE HOURS AGO...AND HASN'T COME BACK!

THE POLICE HAD COME...HAD SEARCHED THE GROUNDS... AND FOUND HIM...

POOR OLD GINK! SLIPPED AND FELL, I GUESS!

WELL, LET'S GET HIM INSIDE!

YES, THEY'D GOTTEN AWAY WITH IT! CORA INHERITED THE MONEY BUT SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED TO HER! PERHAPS IT WAS HER CONSCIENCE BOTHERING HER! ANYWAY, SHE'D BEGUN TO BROOD...LOSE WEIGHT... AGE RAPIDLY...

CORA! YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING TERRIBLE, LATELY! YOU'VE *GOT* TO FORGET ABOUT IT, DO YOU HEAR?

I CAN'T, RALPH! SOB I...CAN'T!

SHE HAD GROWN NERVOUS...FRIGHTENED! SHE'D JUMP AT EVERY SOUND! THEN SHE'D HAD HER HEART ATTACK...

SHE'S A SICK WOMAN, RALPH! ANOTHER ATTACK WILL SURELY KILL HER! SHE MUST TAKE IT *VERY EASY*...

I UNDERSTAND, DOCTOR!

AND SO THE IDEA HAD COME TO RALPH! WITH CORA DEAD, THE WEATHERBY FORTUNE WOULD BE *HIS*... ALL OF IT! AND CORA WOULD BE A PUSHOVER...

GOOD LORD!

WHAT! WHAT IS IT, RALPH?

I...I THOUGHT I SAW HIS FACE... *UNCLE ALEX'S FACE*...STARING AT US... THROUGH THE WINDOW!

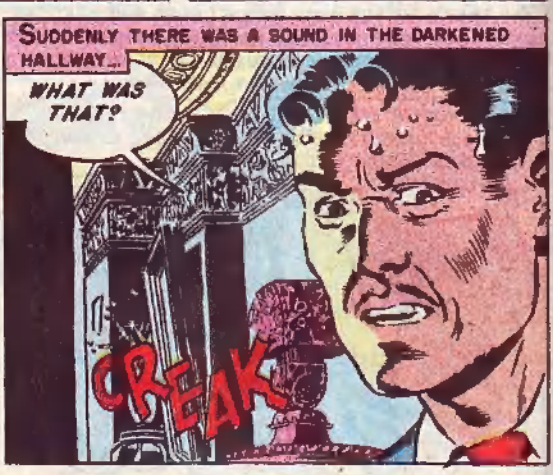
NO! YOU'RE... JOKING... SOB... WITH ME!

THE WIND SLAMMED A SHUTTER DOWNSTAIRS AND RALPH SNAPPED OUT OF HIS REVERIE! CORA, STILL TREMBLING, WAS STARING INTO THE DARKENED HALLWAY...
WHAT...WAS THAT? ANOTHER FOOTSTEP?
N-N-NO! I...I...

RALPH SMILED! THIS NIGHT...THE WIND...EVERYTHING HAD BEEN PERFECT! 'I SHOULD HAVE BEEN AN ACTOR', HE THOUGHT! ANY MOMENT NOW...ANY MOMENT HER POUNDING HEART WOULD FAIL...
HE'S COMING, CORA! DON'T YOU HEAR HIM?
YES... I...

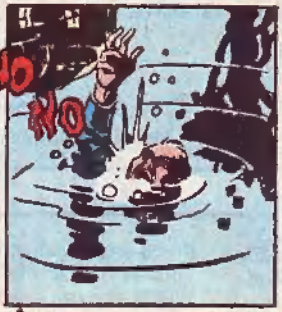
SUDDENLY HER EYES SEEMED TO POP OUT OF HER HEAD! RALPH WAITED! 'THIS IS IT, SURE', HE THOUGHT! SHE HEAVED A FINAL WRETCHING GASP AND DOUBLED UP...
CORA!

RALPH BENT OVER HER! SHE WAS DEAD...
POOR CORA! POOR...POOR CORA!


SUDDENLY THERE WAS A SOUND IN THE DARKENED HALLWAY...
WHAT WAS THAT?
CREAK

IT CAME THROUGH THE DOOR! IT WAS BENT OVER... LIKE AN OLD MAN...
A-ALEX!

THE STENCH OF GRAVE-MOLD FILLED THE ROOM...
KEEP AWAY! KEEP AWAY FROM ME!



AND THEN, EVEN THAT DISAPPEARED INTO THE MUD!

The Crypt Keeper